

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS NASSAU 00071

SIPDIS
CXNASSAU:

ACTION: AMB
INFO: RSO POL FBI CONS DCM

DISSEMINATION: AMB /1
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: DCM:HARDTDB
DRAFTED: POL:PIJUKIC
CLEARED: POL:DBOCONNER, RSO:ADEJONG, CONS:KRABASSA

VZCZCBHI333
RR RUEHC RUCNCOM
DE RUEHBH #0071/01 0251517
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 251517Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY NASSAU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5145
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NASSAU 000071

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR, DS/ITA, DS/IP/WHA, AND CA/OCS/ACS/WHA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [BF](#) [CASC](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: DOWNTOWN NASSAU MURDER PRESSURES GOVERNMENT TO ACT
ON CRIME

REF: NASSAU 1458

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Deadly violence struck the tourist and commercial heart of downtown Nassau January 7 as a drive-by shooter missed his intended mark, instead mortally wounding a high school student waiting in a crowd at a bus stop. The shooting prompted renewed concern about the impact of rising crime on tourism, the backbone of the local and national economy. Media speculation centered on fears of a potential issuance of a travel advisory by the U.S. as a result of violence moving into the tourist center of the country. Post dispelled this national anxiety in public statements highlighting information already available on State Department web sites for travelers, which urges caution even in tourist areas. The incident nevertheless represents a potentially significant development in a general increase in crime that has afflicted the country. It has increased pressure on the government to take prompt, meaningful action against crime. END SUMMARY.

RANDOM SHOOTING TRAUMATIZES DOWNTOWN SHOPPERS, TOURISTS

¶2. (U) A high school student died from multiple bullet wounds on January 7 after falling victim to a drive-by shooting at a bus stop in the commercial heart of downtown Nassau. The brazen attack in broad daylight on busy Bay Street sent cruise visitors fleeing to the safety of their ships, locals scrambling for cover, and witnesses shocked at the ensuing chaos. Police quickly apprehended three other men waiting at the same bus stop, believed to be the intended

targets of the shooting. Police also identified a suspect and launched a public manhunt. The media reported his capture on January 20. The motive for the shooting remains unclear.

FEAR OF U.S. TRAVEL WARNING

13. (U) The downtown killing at the peak of the afternoon rush hour prompted renewed concern in the public and press about the potential issuance of a travel advisory or warning by the U.S. Embassy -- an almost compulsive anxiety within the tourist dependent island. In fact, the media have speculated for months, as the murder tally rose, over such an announcement and its potential negative effects on the all-important tourism sector, which forms the backbone of the economy in Nassau and The Bahamas. Post sought to dispel the renewed speculation and anxiety with comments to a leading newspaper making clear that there were no plans to issue an advisory, as publicly available consular information already noted the high crime rate and the potential for violent crime in tourist areas. The Ambassador repeated these sentiments in an impromptu radio appearance the same day.

RIPPLE EFFECTS OF CRIME

14. (U) The tragic death of a high school student on the first day of classes in the New Year spurred another bout of national soul-searching about crime -- already perceived to be spinning out of control at the end of 2007 with a record number of murders -- and its causes and effects. Many observers and witnesses expressed disbelief that anyone could be so foolish and callous as to discharge firearms in the middle of downtown Nassau in a high-traffic area in front of numerous passersby, and only hundreds of yards from the cruise ships which bring the tourists and cash upon which small businessmen, and the broader economy, almost completely depend. Many observers commented on the breach of an informal 'understanding' that such incidents not occur on Bay Street, given its importance to the country's economy.

15. (U) The victim's death prompted the Ministry of Tourism to issue an immediate statement of condolence, in a clear sign of official concern about how the incident might be perceived outside the country. The incident, albeit rare and isolated, represents a watershed in the ongoing "crime wave" in the country. While high crime is an unfortunate fact of life in Nassau, most of the worst violence has been limited to certain neighborhoods and areas of the capital not normally frequented by tourists, and generally avoided by other island residents. This brazen attack suggests that inhibitions about violent criminal activity in tourist areas have eroded, if not entirely disappeared. The incident has also renewed demands for immediate, muscular government action on crime. The last murder of the year occurred on December 29, when a policeman was killed in the line of duty in Nassau, capping a record-breaking year of 79 murders and across-the-board increases in violent crime in The Bahamas (see reftel).

COMMENT

16. (SBU) The fatal shooting, coupled with continuing criminal violence in the capital -- including a stabbing in scuffle again on Bay Street January 16 -- has generated increased political pressure on the Ingraham administration to address high crime rates and intractable problems in the criminal justice system. The opposition has strongly criticized the FNM government's policy shifts in the law enforcement area, including high-level personnel changes in the police force, and is likely to try to capitalize on the recent events to make their case that the government erred in ending PLP neighborhood policing efforts. How the government meets the

crime challenge will play an increasingly decisive role in how the public perceives its overall effectiveness. This event has brought home to the cabinet that it has no higher priority than beating back the surge in crime before the violence begins to impact The Bahamas' tourism-dependent economy.

SIEGEL